

September 19

After 10 years, the date is set for Dale Farm eviction

THE multi-million pound Dale Farm eviction will begin on September 19, the Echo can reveal.

Basildon Council has confirmed it will start writing to travellers at the illegal site and residents in Crays Hill next week, but as yet will not officially announce the date.

In preparation for the eviction, a no through road restriction was put in place on Oak Road, which leads to the site.

But an Echo source said: "Preparations for the eviction will

EXCLUSIVE

By JON AUSTIN

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take place on the Friday before and over the weekend. People will be aware when it happens and it is hoped some or all will leave in advance to avoid violence or confrontation."

Ugly scenes are now expected during the operation expected to last several weeks.

A protest march from Wickford to the site on September 10 is

expected to bring even more demonstrators.

John Jones, 65, from Bristol said hundreds of people, including other travellers, would be coming from Bristol and Wales towards the end of the week to take part.

Although sources have leaked the date to the Echo, travellers want it announced officially.

One heavily pregnant woman from the site went to the council offices last week to demand the date amid fears she could give birth during the operation.

Grattan Puxon, a campaigner

for the site, said: "Her due date is in two weeks, and she feared she could go into labour when they do the eviction."

The council will not confirm if any individuals were given the date ahead of this week's letters going out.

But despite the date now being set, travellers are hopeful the eviction can still be blocked after a United Nations committee sent a clear message to the Government it opposed the eviction.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

called on a halt to the eviction until "culturally suitable" accommodation is found.

Families broke out in cheers as news was announced at the site.

The international condemnation followed lobbying by site spokesman Richard Sheridan last month.

She feared she could go into labour when they do the eviction

Action is about us upholding the law

BASILDON Council will ignore the United Nations recommendation.

Council leader Tony Ball said: "The action Basildon Council is taking is about upholding the law, which the travellers have broken. It has nothing to do with their lifestyle or background."

We would treat any member of the local community who developed or built on green belt land without permission exactly the same.

"We have spent ten years trying to avoid a forced clearance and always sought to persuade the travellers to move on peacefully, and to help them with that process. In all that time they have refused to cooperate."

"Now we have exhausted the legal process and the final 28-day notice has expired we will be writing to the travellers to inform them when the clearance will begin. This is now a difficult



■ Tony Ball
— unrepentant

DALE FARM



Don't let us out. Kathleen and Caitlin McCarthy during a media briefing.



Countdown to eviction

5-PAGE NEWS SPECIAL



■ Protest camp – temporary shelters set up on the illegal section of Dale Farm

Picture: EASTNEWS



■ Illegal – a section of the travellers' camp



■ Legal – one of the unused boarded-up properties

Church dodges question on land

BISHOPS who united to condemn the eviction have dodged questions of church land being made temporarily available to travellers.

Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Rev Stephen Cottrell and Bishop of Brentwood, Thomas McMahon have been vocal in calling the council to halt the eviction until alternative sites are found.

There have been widespread calls for the Church of England and Catholic churches to explain why, as major landowners, they do not put up land as a temporary measure.

But spokesman for both the bishops said: "This is not a local matter but a national issue. No local diocese or any other local organisation can deliver a viable national solution."

Bishop Cottrell, revealed he had received critical e-mails for showing support.

When asked why he was supporting illegal activity, he replied: "It's not that I'm condoning illegal conduct, but I don't think bulldozing the site will solve the problem. The problem will just go elsewhere."

"I'm simply saying, what are they supposed to do? There's nowhere for them to go."

"Surely there has to be a better way than to bulldoze their homes. It's going to cause chaos."

Legal part of the site almost empty

By JON AUSTIN
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TRAVELLERS who claim they have nowhere to go are living next to an almost empty legal camp.

About half of Dale Farm has planning permission and it is the illegal site which is being bulldozed.

A community of Irish travellers known as the Sheridan Clan own both, but most of the 40 legal plots are only occupied for one month each year.

Aerial pictures taken of the site this week show evidence of just six being occupied, leaving 34 vacant.

The Echo photographed many of these with boarded windows, padlocked gates and overgrown yards.

Basildon Council leader Tony Ball said officers used empty homes legislation to contact owners to find out why they were empty and see if those on illegal pitches could rent them.

He said: "The information we got back through various means, including travellers on Dale Farm and representative Candy Sheridan, is empty plots are being used sometimes and not available to anyone else. I was told most are only occupied one month each year, but it would be considered trespass if others



■ Underused – a section of the legal site at Dale Farm

Picture: STEVE O'CONNELL BA40922

sites in Basildon and nowhere else for people at Dale Farm.

The travellers' response contradicts evidence given in planning inquiries, when it was said they were a close-knit community, with relatives on the legal site

said: "It is rather strange these pitches lay empty so often when we are told there is such a shortage, and where are the owners?"

The Echo contacted Mrs Sheridan, but got no response.

A source close to the legal part.

He said: "They have been cleared a long time ago, so if it comes to it and they are forced from Dale Farm, they will be able to move just a few hundred

Protesters put up the barricades



■ Barricade – more scaffolding is being put up at the entrance to the site

PROTESTERS at Dale Farm have continued fortifying the site.

It comes amid claims Southend and Basildon hospitals will no longer send midwives to the camp due to safety fears.

Basildon Council was notified by campaigners at the weekend of four Dale Farm residents being hospitalised, including cancer sufferer Cornelius Sheridan, in his fifties, and pregnant mothers.

The e-mail from traveller representatives to the council claimed health services will no longer attend.

It also warned of a woman who cares for her mother with dementia threatening suicide due to stress.

Len Gridley, 52, whose house backs on to the site, said men were working on top of a scaffold barricade that towers

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above his back fence.

There are thought to be up to 100 protesters living there.

About half are said to be Cambridge University students.

A source said relations between travellers and supporters was not as harmonious as being played out in media.

The source said: "Some of the families are packed and ready to go because they can't cope with outsiders turning the place into a fortress and all the media."

"Some could actually move off because of this."

The source said some travellers were willing to stay and fight, but others were not relishing living under siege if they try to keep out police and bailiffs. Protesters are said to

be sleeping on scaffolding towers to keep constant watch for bailiffs. Others are said to be burrowing underground and using old fridges to protect themselves to create obstacles.

A Jewish solidarity group yesterday visited Dale Farm to show support.

A workshop was held by activists who advocate no border controls between countries.

Rabbi Janet Burden said: "I believe the obligation to protect this ethnic minority's way of life is a human rights issue that, in this particular and unusual case, may need to trump the planning law designed to protect green belt."

A United Nations committee on forced evictions, chaired by Yves Cabannes, a professor at UCL London, will hold a meeting at the site on September 14.

Council could be damaged

BASILDON Council's new spin doctor says the authority's reputation could be seriously damaged by the looming eviction.

Cormac Smith, a consultant from Westminster Council brought in to run the PR department, said the council was up against a very media savvy and emotive campaign.

He said the use of the term ethnic cleansing was extremely unhelpful.

Mr Smith said: "They are fighting on emotional terms. They use women and children to tell their story – you don't see

many men. This has the potential to seriously damage the reputation of the council and, if that happens, the people who will suffer first and foremost are the residents."

"The challenge is for us to be seen to be upholding the law of the land and to do it so we're treating everyone equally."

His comments came as Sally Bercow became the latest "celebrity" to speak out against the eviction.

An evictee herself – from the Celebrity Big Brother house – she wrote in her new Sunday

Express column her "heart goes out" to the 90 families at Crays Hill.

The wife of Commons Speaker John Bercow said: "The simple fact is there is nowhere else for them to go."

During time in the Big Brother house she befriended celebrity Irish traveller Paddy Doherty.

Tony Ball, leader of Basildon Council, said he doubted she had ever visited the site. He said: "We have the backing of the vast majority of residents in Basildon."

EQUIPMENT APPEAL

THE determination of protesters to turn Dale Farm into a fortress can be seen in an online appeal.

It asks for donations of an array of items, including oil drums, scaffolding poles and clips, rope, climbing equipment, nails and bolts, reinforcing rods, corrugated metal, fencing, scrap wood, metal pipes, bicycle chain breakers and a digger.

It also requests waterproof paint and buckets.

They also want binoculars for lookouts and bottled water and energy bars to keep weary demonstrators' strength up.

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COMMENT

It will not be far to travel

HOMELESS is a word that seems to have been redefined by the Dale Farm travelling community.

The normal meaning is: No home to go to. The core of their case against eviction is that they will be made homeless.

Their supposedly wretched plight brought a horde of activists down to Crays Hill ready to fight with the folk of Dale Farm. There is just one flaw in this case, however. It is completely false.

The travellers do have somewhere to go. All they need do is move to a perfectly legal travellers' site next door.

The site offers plenty of room along with an easy, peaceful settlement of the long-running confrontation at Dale Farm. This simple solution seems almost to have been overlooked amid all the heat generated by the traveller settlement.

The travellers on their part seem wilfully keen to invent imaginary obstacles, claiming they don't have permission to move to this site.

This flimsy argument is swiftly dispensed with, since the site's owners are members of the same travelling family. Besides, how come these seasoned illegal settlers are suddenly so squeamish about obtaining permission to settle somewhere?

In short, the homelessness argument, the core of the travellers' ten-year stand, has been comprehensively demolished. They do have a new home waiting for them and that is where they should head, thereby saving a mountain of grief and public money. What's keeping them?

TIP-OFFS, QUERIES, COMPLAINTS

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Countdown to eviction

5-PAGE NEWS SPECIAL



■ Speaking out – the travellers at the press conference held at Dale Farm

Picture: LUAN MARSHALL BA49053_003

Travellers challenge minister to meeting

By GINA MARDEN
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to him about who is actually breaking the law.

"Eric Pickles has funded the money to get us out of here and that is very unfair."

"I can't read or write and I don't know about politics, but I want to speak to this gentleman about who is breaking the law and he will be welcome on this site with open arms."

Mr Pickles's department is paying £1.2million towards Basildon Council's eviction bill.

He did not return calls to the Echo to say whether he will take up the invitation.

However, a spokesman for the Department for Communities and Local Government said: "The

British courts have found the developments at Dale Farm are in breach of planning law and Basildon Council is within its rights to evict travellers from the site.

"It has taken ten years of failed negotiations and legal process to reach this point, and the unprecedented level of unauthorised development on green belt land has severely damaged community relations."

At the press conference, travellers and supporters from Camp Constant – a makeshift camp set up for protesters opposing the eviction – also took the opportunity to refute claims up to 1,000 anarchists could descend on the site to take on bailiffs and police.

Mrs McCarthy said: "There are

rumours about people coming in and taking over."

"The real story is these people here are here to support us. They are not causing violence."

A woman, calling herself Marina who acted as spokeswoman for Camp Constant, added: "We would urge anybody who cares about human rights and peaceful resistance to join us."

"This eviction is a form of ethnic cleansing and we are determined to stop that."

"We have been made so welcome by the travellers."

"This is a community which deserves protection."

Mrs McCarthy admitted there were gas canisters on the site, but said they were attached to caravans and only used for cooking.

Mum's school fears We've nowhere to go

A MUM of a boy with Down's syndrome said the eviction will leave her with no choice, but to withdraw her son from his special needs school.

Six-year-old Dan Quilligan has been attending the Pioneer School, Church Road, Basildon, where his mum Margaret says he has made friends and been flourishing.

Margaret, 45, said the family's eviction from their home on the illegal part of the Dale Farm site, in Crays Hill, near Billericay, will leave her son with an uncertain future.



■ Worried for her son's schooling – Margaret Quilligan
BA49053_105

"I love him, but I can't raise him on my own. I need the help of the teachers at his school."

"I would like him to have some chance in life."

A PENSIONER and her husband broke down in tears as she explained they would have nowhere to go once evicted from Dale Farm.

Ellen and James Sheridan, both 76, have ailing health.

Speaking at a press conference on the illegal site in Oak Lane, Crays Hill, Mrs Sheridan, who was overcome with emotion, said: "I have lived in England for 53 years and this is the worst experience I've had in my life."

"Me and my husband are both 76."



■ In tears – pensioner James Sheridan
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